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SUBJECT: PARTIES ACCENTUATE THE NEGATIVE AFTER MIXED STATE ELECTIONS RESULTS

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Recriminations are raining this week across Mexico's political landscape in the wake of August 5 state and local elections in Baja California, Aguascalientes and Oaxaca. All three parties are smarting in one locale or another. In Baja California, PRI's Jorge Hank Rhon broke an awkward silence to say he was "licking his wounds" and blame low voter turnout for his defeat. PRI seems to be edging toward contesting the elections results this week. In Oaxaca, PRD leaders, in typical fashion, disagreed over the reasons for their party's poor showing. In the state of Aguascalientes, PAN Governor Reynoso stands accused of aiding and abetting opposition candidates. End summary.

Beaten in Baja

¶2. (SBU) Twenty four hours after Baja California elections authorities projected PAN's Jose Guadalupe Osuna Millan the clear winner of Sunday's gubernatorial races, former Tijuana Mayor Hank Rhon finally admitted defeat and joked about his much-noticed absence from the public eye for two days. Hank said he'd been licking his wounds and preferred that his party leadership take the heat for his loss. He also lamented the slow vote count and told a TV audience that "absenteeism won the day" in Sunday's elections. He noted only 800,000 out of 2 million eligible voters participated in polling. (At 41%. voter turnout on Sunday was actually somewhat higher than the previous two state/local elections.)

¶3. (SBU) Hank said he would leave it up to PRI leaders as to whether to challenge Sunday's results. Party president Beatriz Paredes indicated her party was studying a possible challenge in specific districts, but was vague about whether it would contest the gubernatorial results. State PRI officials have already called for a nullification of the gubernatorial results.

¶4. (SBU) Media noted that Paredes and other senior PRI partisans had given only lukewarm support to the flamboyant and controversial candidate and that national teachers union leader (SNTE) Ester Elba Gordillo (ousted from the PRI last year) had filled the void and turned around a lackluster campaign by Hank's PAN challenger. Commentators speculated that Gordillo's presence generated enough votes among Baja teachers to tip the close race in Osuna Millan's favor - which the latter denied in a press conference on August 8.

¶5. (SBU) PAN also recovered the municipalities of Tijuana and Mexicali, which the PRI had governed since the 2004 elections. Osuna Millan will have a PAN majority in the state congress. 14 of the 16 generally elected seats were

won by PAN. (Another nine seats will be based on proportional representation.)

Who Lost Oaxaca?

¶ 16. (SBU) PRD leaders likewise claimed low turnout undermined their candidates in the state of Oaxaca. Fewer than 23 percent of eligible voters cast ballots. While the party's Senate leader Carlos Navarette acknowledged that his party had erred in tying itself too closely with APPO, which spear-headed last year's disruptive protests in Oaxaca City, PRD president Leonel Cota complained that Mexico's "bankrupt" electoral system was to blame for the party's poor showing. Cota averred that Mexico was "headed down a dead end street," as evidenced by low turnouts in every state and local elections held this year. For his part, Navarette indirectly chided failed presidential candidate Lopez Obrador's strategy of co-campaigning with APPO supporters. He said that the PRD had failed to recognize the extent to which Oaxacan voters were fed up with the prolonged crisis and acknowledged that his party had in fact strengthened Governor Ulises Ruiz's hand.

¶ 17. (SBU) While many also attribute PRI's victory to the governor's heavy use of party machinery (which is far more developed in Oaxaca than that of the other parties) to turn out the vote, some independent observers noted that many races boiled down to contests between former PRI colleagues. PRD's Oaxacan slate was said to have been drawn heavily from erstwhile PRI partisans recently coaxed into running as opposition candidates. Others noted, however, that the Oaxaca results marked another personal defeat for Lopez

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Obrador, who had campaigned extensively in the state on behalf of his party. At the least, Sunday's results undermined AMLO's base in the state: three of his closest confidants lost their legislative seats.

PAN Mulls Aguascalientes Defeat

¶ 18. (SBU) Finally, PAN's unexpected loss in elections in the state of Aguascalientes touched off feuding between the state's governor and party leaders who accused him of being less than "blanciazul," amid charges he'd helped non-PAN candidates. A 1995 PRI, convert, Governor Luis Armando Reynoso's party credentials had been suspect since his election in 2004, and there was already talk of expelling him. PAN's loss of seven out of 11 municipalities in the State (including the state capital) as well as 11 of its 18 state legislative seats has accentuated the acrimony. The party's state directorate was meeting this week to discuss allegations that Reynoso used his office's resources to support Convergencia candidates.

¶ 19. (SBU) Meanwhile, PAN president Manuel Espino used his party's poor showing to take an indirect swipe at President Calderon's Los Pinos team, saying that arbitrary selection of PAN state candidates by "less than democratic means" was to blame for the party's loss in recent elections. Espino urged party reforms to open up the selection process. He offered few specifics to back up his complaint, but his remarks recalled the bitter flap in May after Yucatan's elections when he charged that Calderon operatives, headed by Chief of Staff Juan Mourino, had inappropriately meddled in the state to PAN's ultimate disadvantage.

¶ 10. (SBU) Comment: All three parties are guilty of poorly coordinated efforts to support their candidates in the three elections. Other than that, the results provide little in the way of a national bell-weather. Moreover, with partisans in each party pointing fingers at their co-religionists, it

is unlikely that fallout from last Sunday will impact inter-party relationships or complicate discussions of such national issues as fiscal or state reform. End comment.

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